

'43 coppers not worth more than a penny

By Roger Boye

This week's column answers more questions from Chicago Tribune readers.

Q—I own a 1943 copper penny. A reference book says the 1943s are supposed to be made of steel coated with zinc because of a shortage of copper during World War II. Would my coin have special value?

O.H., Brookfield

A—Probably not. Uncle Sam did produce a few copper cents in error during 1943, and those coins fetch top dollar among collectors. But over the years, forgers have created thousands of fakes, often by altering the digits on copper Lincolns dated 1945 or 1948. Of course, the phonies have no value.

Let an expert peruse your coin, but don't get your hopes up. Most likely, the specimen is worthless.

Q—Are Jefferson nickels made since the 1960s worth saving for their metal content?

B.C., Chicago

A—No. Each coin contains about 3.7 grams of copper and 1.2 grams of nickel, metal that's worth less than one cent on commodity markets.

Q—My son has started a collection of Lincoln pennies by checking his pocket change. Are there any rare dates from the past 25 years that we should look for?

Y.P., Rockford

A—The two big winners are error coins. A 1972 no-mint-mark cent with a doubled design on the heads side usually goes for at least \$130 and a no-mint-mark 1983 with a doubled reverse fetches \$75 or more, depending on condition.

Q—We own a 1964 Kennedy half dollar that someone plated with gold. Is the metal valuable?

W.R., Chicago

A—Most likely the gold is exceedingly thin and worth just a few cents. But your coin also contains .36 of an ounce of silver, currently valued at about \$2.

Q—What does a large "O" mean on the tails sides of my 1898 and 1899 silver dollars?

P.W., Oak Park

A—It identifies the New Orleans mint, where Uncle Sam made coins from 1838 until 1861 and from 1879 until 1909.

● Questions about coins or currency? Send your queries to Roger Boye, The Arts, Chicago Tribune, 435 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60611. Enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope if you want a personal reply and allow at least three weeks for an answer.